



Martin Luther King Jr.'s unfinished labor

Today we honor and celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. the third Monday every January, but the version of King we hear most about has been sanitized, whitewashed. We hear a lot about King the dreamer, King the integrationist, King the civil rights icon.

Too often neglected is the King who hungered for economic justice, who stood with black workers in union struggles, who called for a massive government jobs program. That King, in the final days of his life, was organizing a Poor People's Movement — to march on Washington, D.C., and set up a tent city there until the government got serious about ending poverty. That King was the target of dismissive newspaper editorials and surveillance by a paranoid FBI.

Even when we hear about the 1963 March on Washington — at which he made the “I Have A Dream” speech — it's too often forgotten what they were marching for. The march — the largest demonstration in

U.S. history up to that point — wasn't just for an end to racial discrimination. It was the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.” Not just freedom, but jobs. Not just an end to racial discrimination in housing, but a guarantee of decent housing for all Americans. Not just an end to racial discrimination in employment, but an increase in the minimum wage to \$2-an-hour — which would be over \$15 in today's dollars. Not just an end to voting restrictions, but a comprehensive program to train and employ all unemployed Americans.

Those were King's goals in 1963, and they remained his goals in 1968 when he was assassinated. Too many of them today remain undone.

So this MLK Day, let's not congratulate ourselves on all that he and we achieved. Let's

“We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. So I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis in support of striking public-sector workers, the day before his assassination

take up his unfinished labor. Let's pass a \$15 minimum wage, and demand that government intervene to reverse growing economic inequality.



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